

BACK
TALK



WESTON WRITES: A POETRY COLLECTION



We acknowledge that this land, where we wrote and published this book, is the unceded territory of the Mississauga of the Credit, the Anishinabek, the Haudenosaunee, the Wendat, and many other Nations. Tkaronto is Treaty 13 territory. This city is also home to many peace keeping systems such as the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt. This meeting place, where the trees meet the water, is still home to many Indigenous peoples from across Turtle Island. We are grateful for the caretakers of this land. Caretakers of the past, present and future.

Spoken word poetry is a form of oral storytelling intended to pass on knowledge. Oral storytelling originates in many Indigenous cultures. Spoken word poetry also has roots in beat poetry in Black communities. We are thankful to be able to share our stories with you.

About the Collaborative Program

NYWC is grateful to have received funding from the Canadian Women's Foundation (CWF) through the Slight Family Foundation Ending Gender-based Violence in Critical Communities Grant to develop and pilot a program aimed at shifting how young women, girls and gender diverse youth perceive their future and how they expect to be treated in their interpersonal relationships. Recognizing that race, age and gender play a role in how youth perceive themselves and their future, including internalized racism, sexism and media messaging placing an overemphasis on romantic and sexual relationships, we saw this as an opportunity to support youth in our community since we recognized that there are impacts to how young women and girls see themselves, their future prospects and relationships, which puts them at a greater risk for interpersonal violence. With the above in mind, we aimed to coordinate a project rooted in violence prevention with youth by supporting them in exploring the quality of their interpersonal relationships.

As NYWC values collaborative partnerships with agencies working to support women and gender diverse people, we partnered with Sheatre, Canvas Arts Action Programs, and Weston Collegiate Institute to coordinate and facilitate arts-based programming for youth in the Weston-Mount Dennis community. Through this partnership, we coordinated and implemented two initiatives: an interactive production of Sheatre's "Far From the Heart", a Forum Theatre play about coming of age, violation and redemption; and a creative writing program for youth, influenced by Canvas Programs' spoken word program, Back Talk: Voices Against Violence.

Considering that we wanted to support youth within our very own community, we conducted outreach and sought support from agencies serving youth and secondary schools within our area to determine their interest in collaborating on these initiatives. Upon completion of the program, 26 students participated in at least one session of the program: 12 were involved in the forum theatre project and 14 were involved in the spoken word program. As an aspect of the spoken word program involved either performing their spoken word pieces to the public or publicizing their work via a chapbook, the students from Weston Collegiate Institute ultimately decided that they preferred that their poems were shared with the public with this book.

Founded in 1988, North York Women's Centre is a registered charity that consists of a community of diverse women working to advance equality and empower women to effect positive change. We offer free services and programs, including our Women's Empowerment Series, drop-in lounge, and one-on-one support. NYWC also engages in public education and advocacy work to benefit women experiencing gender-based violence.

At NYWC, we envision a world where all doors are open for all women and gender-diverse people. Our guiding principles involve promoting equity, equality and social and economic justice for all women, and working within a framework of anti-oppression, anti-racism and feminism. We practice feminism by asking questions from a women's perspective, acknowledging a power imbalance to the disadvantage of women and demanding that women's personal experiences become recognized in public policies.

At Sheatre – Community Arts for Social Change, professional artists and tools are brought together to stimulate young people's expression of their ideas, values and concerns in a safe environment. Sheatre believes in the power of theatre and the arts to change lives and help build a compassionate and healthy society. Sheatre's Forum Theatre plays provoke people to change their world. The play *Far from the Heart* seeks to help young people develop healthy attitudes and behaviours based on honesty, equality, respect and safety.

Canvas Arts Action Programs (Canvas) is a registered charity founded in 2014 to prevent gender-based and sexual violence, homophobia and transphobia. Based out of Tkaronto, Canvas uses interactive, arts-inspired training programs to educate young people, and the adults who work with them, on gender equity, consent, and 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion. Together, we can work towards a more empathetic, equitable and kinder worldview.

The Back Talk program supports youth in using poetry and spoken word to discuss experiences with topics including sexual violence, gender equity, and resilience. The Back Talk Collective shares poetry to educate, inspire, and most importantly: Talk Back.

Over the course of several workshops, our poets have worked towards writing and sharing their powerful stories. We are incredibly grateful and in awe of the vulnerability, compassion, and talent displayed by our artists.

Thank you for picking up this book. The Back Talk Collective is made up of young artists speaking their truths. These truths can sometimes be hard to read, and we urge you to care for yourselves throughout these pages. We hope this collection of poems will bring you what you are looking for.

M // to comfort the disturbed

I am not a poet

I am simply just someone with a pen and paper

The words I write are not pretty

Not meant to be happy or uplifting

I was born to disturb and made to distract

My sole purpose is to horrify those who are comfortable

I am not a poet

But rather a place

A place where those just as disturbed as me

Can celebrate the monsters within us that shape our very being



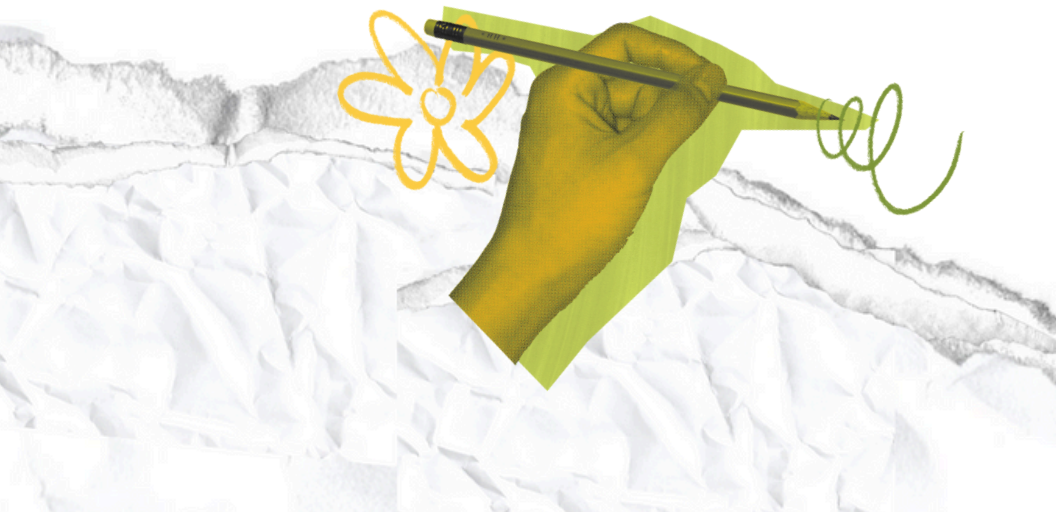
Stacy // The thought process

They want me to compose
A thought, an ode, an elegy, poem
But what do those words
Even mean to me

They tell me,
“Oh, compose something related to space,”
And that’s when it begins
With the timer set

Like that of a rocket set to launch
But instead it is my mind that blasts off
To unknown worlds
Trying to find the right way to begin my composition
As I travel from place to place
My mind starts spiraling
Forming a galaxy of its own
Figuring out the rhymes
That would fit inside this poem

But soon enough
It all comes to an end
As I hear the beeping sound of
The timer goes off.



Koraleigh // Secrets

I have many secrets. Some have been given in whispers during tiring lessons. Others have been slipped to me by people I refuse to name. Their absence leaving a hole in my heart. Then there are the special ones. The ones I try not to tell. The ones that would ruin me, leave me lonely. But with you... I want to tell you. I want to see if you will leave when you know the things I've done. Will you stay once you know everything. My heart seems to think so but my brain is more rational. You will be different once you get know. I've thought of every outcome and most of them end with me alone again. Will you stay if you learn who I truly am and not the mask i wear.



Anonymous

All this time I've been waiting for someone or something to save me from myself and from the parts of my life that are kept hidden. I've been waiting on a miracle from God, I've been waiting for a guardian angel or a fairy-godparent to come rescue me. From the uncontrolled rage from within to the fire that causes the destruction all around to the constant battles at hand and the battles from within the fortress. There was no one there to save me and there was nothing there to help. I prayed and prayed to God above for help in this war I'm in and I finally realized that I'm the knight in shining armor that must rescue me. With help from above and hope from within I can defeat the beast that stands in my way to my happily ever after.



M.R.N // Love I Desire

I want to be loved for who I am
My imperfections, the steps I
Take towards perfection.

I want people to pour into me
As I do unto them.
I don't want to be taken for granted

I want to feel seen and heard
I want a hug, that will leave me feeling peace
I want to be protected, like a King fights for his Queen

I want to be understood
I want to be loved freely



Angel // Snow

Wine spilled,
White trickles on the ground from the sky
But its not snowing
The clouds aren't stretched on the x-axis
I can't even see them

Their mouths are moving
People are talking
A whole mouthful, but they're saying a whole lotta nothing

Snow falls on my nose and it blends in
No scent, but the feeling shoots up my nose
It harbors true love

When winter comes, the feeling is addicting
Even when i'm numb and I can't feel at all
Give me snow and watch it melt on paper
It brings out the best in people.
Warm and sensual feelings at this time of year
Love can't compare to it



Anonymous // Life in another

If given a chance to be reborn. I will love to be given freedom, be given right of choices, what to do, when to do it, what to wear and so on. I know advice will be best but don't force it on someone, I need the freedom, just like a caged bird who want to fly while not let it fly than caging it. I know they will be regrets, but if there is no regrets and obstacles then your choices is not right.



Sabrina // Untitled

What they don't tell you about the hijab is that it's something you yourself need to decide to partake in. To infuse with your life. The honest truth is that hijab itself is not the oppressor but the marionette's behind the narrative are. Like ants in an ant farm we are forced and at the mercy of the founder. There's a barrier on two sides to the oppression. The west side of the barrier is there the choice of wearing the hijab is taken away, withheld or punished through the cursed words law, nationalism, patriotism, and secularism. On the east of the barrier the choice of refraining from wearing the hijab is void, invalid, an error in the great Islamic society. Through the misused and abused words islamic, religion, purity, and modesty. All of this leads to the begging question why can't we women decide for ourselves individually what we should and should not wear. What faith we follow. What path we take. What crossroads to choose from. When will we get a say for ourselves? When will society wake up and realise the idiocy in defining a piece of fabric oppressive when it's the wrongfully chosen and not chosen leaders that are.



Stacy // If only they could talk

People try to voice us the voiceless
Some who are trying to help us,
Others who see us as tools
To be used in power struggles

At night we slumber to wake
To the sounds of machines
Cutting down our friends and family
Is this what we deserve?

We help them with the gas
That poisons theirs and our home
Give them shade
On sweltering hot days

We let them make tools from us
But once used
We are only cut to be forgotten

Not living long enough to see our offspring grow
But what can we do
For our creator left us
To those selfish beings

So I hope in their next life
They will understand our grievances.



M // Untitled

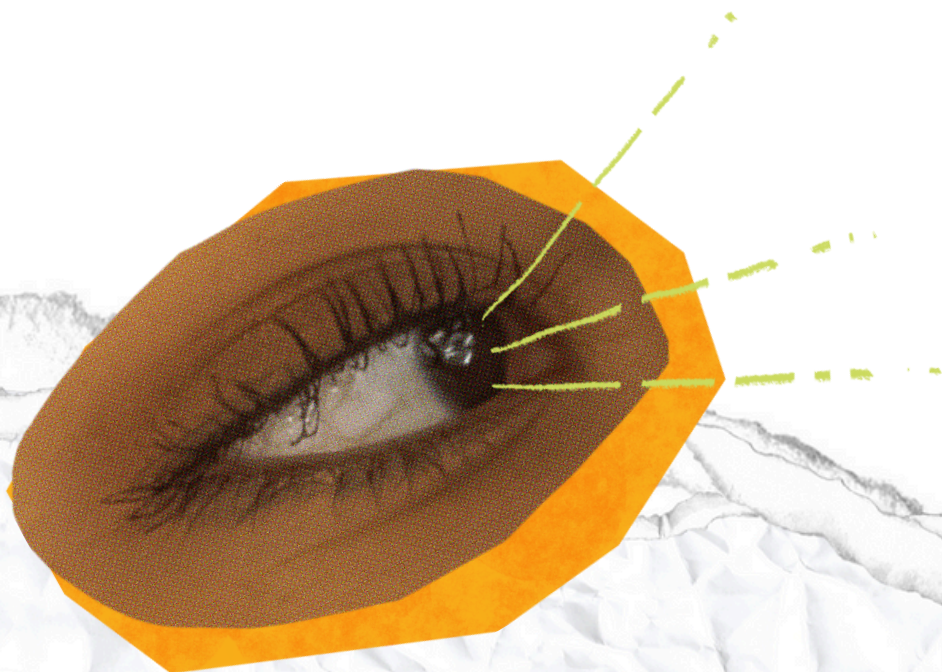
My eyes are a fountain with a broken handle
It is worn out and tired

I cannot communicate with words
Instead I communicate with tears

When unable to express happiness
I will laugh so hard the fountain is turned on once more
And I allow this to be seen

I do not allow others to witness me rock back-and-forth
Or to see me pull at my hair

Instead I will break-down and cry in front of them
For it is much easier to explain sadness than discomfort.



M.R.N // Lurking in the Shadows

My thoughts lurk in the shadows
Eating away at my brain cells
I try to stop them, sometimes I win

Other times they take over my mind.
I want to be free from these thoughts
But I don't think I ever will.



Angel // exodus

I can't afford to miss because my eyes are closed
Dreaming vividly of a pain nobody else knows
Bring me forth before I swim away
in the waters of lukewarm
Torn between true love and passion
Out of body type of experience where I see where I crashed in
Figure 8, I'm livid in a warped perception
Arriving at the the kingdom gates
no room left for negotiation
Twisting' turn restless, lost in addiction
Would've thought twice if I heard that there's no sleep for the wicked
Let me know when it's time to let go
It may be too late
when I come to seek consolidation
And not validation
For all my wrongs (I'm such an ingrate)
In a time I offer dishonesty
Radiation of warmth entails me
I don't know why the scales fall from my eyes
and tears flow never ending
Frail and weak I'm disintegrating
Dragging myself across the floor wailing in a pool of blood under the street
light
but there's a light
marking my exodus as the rain scalds my skin
Then I am no longer my own
When you call the prodigal son home.



Stacy // The truths we ignore

I'd tell you to read harder
Because even though you read,
It won't be enough.

The fruits you bore weren't as sweet
And though you were happy
You weren't content.

If I could I would tell you
But I can't undo
What's done and gone

You might have passed by their standards
But deep down
There is a hole that will haunt you

Screaming and shouting
Telling you,
"Stop pretending for you know,
You didn't try hard enough."



M.R.N. // To Past Me

Dear, Menanyamba, I6

You will be fine, its okay to cry out for help
Don't let your problems eat you up inside
Talk to your friends they'll help you through it
Have that dreadful conversation with your parents
If you feel like no one understands you,
Turn to the creator God, Talk to Him about it all
because he knows and understands you best

Your Future self



Anonymous // Write a past you, this time last year

By this time last year I was usually preparing for a church program held every December. All my siblings and cousins came back to celebrate Christmas and New year. It sometimes used to be dangerous because of the country's insecurities, so parents warn their children to be careful. But it was a lovely celebration where you get to know your cousins and family members, a day you won't forget.



Stacy // The fantasies that we seem to forget

The blackhole that sucks money away
Making people poor,
Unable to go to school,
Lead their ideal lives

I often wonder
Why such a thing exists
It may be invisible
But that's what makes it deadly

But I wonder again
About another one
That could pull me
To spit me out in a new world

No poverty, no wars
No family fights
A paradise that everyone dreams about

But I might never come to see this come to pass
Because as soon as I grasp that land
I have hoped and prayed for
It all fades and turns black

And when I open my eyes
I still find myself



Koraleigh // I am beautiful

"I am beautiful" I say as I feel my pudgy thighs. I squeeze my stomach and smile at how it pokes out. It makes me look healthy. "I am beautiful" I say, trying to sound as obnoxious as possible. My boobs are half out and I'm wearing a short skirt. I see a guy watching me and I know that he thinks I'm easy. If I pretend to be dumb, I'll be ready for him to act. "I am beautiful" I say whispering to myself as I stare into my mirror. My mascara is running down my face and my lipstick is smudged. I look at my body in the mirror as I weep as quietly as I can. "I am beautiful" I think as I get the attention of those around me. They look at me with amazed eyes and I smile at them. "You are beautiful" She says smiling at me. I smile back, knowing that this is a dream that will never come true. "I am beautiful"



Sabrina // Dear Brown and Black

You're the soil from which we plant our crops to which we eat for energy and survival

You're the ground from which we dig for gold and other minerals

You're the surface from which great mountains lay on.

You're the coffee beans from which we use to make coffee

You're the cocoa seeds from which we make chocolate

You're the deepest part of our earth from which we live on.

You're the shea butter from which we use to moisturize our skin and hair

You're the history and ancestry of the greats and unknown

You're the resilience to which we need for all that encounter and overcome.

You're the colour of my skin which makes me proud.



Anonymous // Untitled

Nigeria is sunny, hot, deserted and noisy. Coming to Canada cold, snow, jacket and quiet. New adaptation is so odd to me.

Coming to Canada is very hard for me. Education is really a problem, my English needs improvement and my studies need to change. Adapting to their education system is really difficult and communicating is really hard. These things are killing me but I don't know how to say it because people will not understand so no bother trying.



Timelesswonder // The Outs and Ins of ADHD.

Many have it and many have a say in it.

It's something that distincts me from others. I'm loud when I shouldn't, I'm quiet when I'm not need be. I'm distracted I shouldn't be. I'm focused when it's not needed be. I'm impulsive when it's inconvenient for others and me. I'm always so hyper and full of energy that it self-generates itself. I'm awake during the night many thoughts passing through my head. Many ideas popping in and out. Many feelings and memories rushing through that lead me and take me to new worlds within my mind forging and reforming they are. A fire from within always burning, always bright, always shines through. Brings light and joy to a dim hollow boring. Always brings humour and laughter to the mix. Always brings a smile on a face. Inspires many leaves others in wonder and curiosity. A fire from within always destructive, burns all that surrounds. Blows up the place. Blows up in my face. When the fire is put out. I see all that once was. I see all that I've caused. Regret and remorse fill in my heart. Pain and sorrow lead me to weep. All my emotions enhanced. All my emotions overwhelm me. No one seems to truly understand me. I feel as though I'm a dragon that breathed out fire when its lost control of itself. I feel as though I'm a siren that can't seem to get the right pitch. This power seems to be reckless if not controlled. If not mastered. But I don't know how. And I don't know when. I've tried everything. I've tried all the strategies. I've taken everything I was given but still no change. All I hear is illness, disease, dysfunction, disorder, syndrome. I never get a clear answer. I heard when used properly it can be a superpower. But I honestly don't know and neither do the scientists and doctors know. I've seen and heard others achieve so much and so far with it. Simone Bilies, Howie Mandel, will smith, Micheal Phelps, Albert Einstein, Solange, Paris Hilton, Adam Levine, Ryan Gosling, Emma Watson, Zack Wilson, Channing Tatum, Dav Pilkey, Agatha Christie, George Bernard Shaw, Jules Verne , Walt Disney Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Alexander Graham Bell, Thomas Edison, Leonardo DaVinci, Vincent Van Gogh, Pablo Picasso, Bill Gates, Benjamin Franklin, Isaac Newton, John Kennedy, Steven Hawking, Beethoven and so many more. With this ability, with this power it can have its downsides but it can ultimately lead to greatness and brilliance. I just have to be able to hone its advantages. I don't know how, I don't know when. But somehow, some day. I will have master this thing, this ability, this power called ADHD.



M // gluttony

I am starved
And you are hungry
So I allow you to consume whatever you wish
Even if it means serving my heart to you on a silver platter
So I feed you

I continue to be starved
Yet you crave more
You indulge in what I offer
Biting off more than you can chew

I wither in hunger
There is nothing left of me to starve
So you become angry

Claiming its my fault that I can not provide
When all you ever did was feed off me

Now its my turn to take
And what i'll take is time

Now you are the one starving
And I am finally fed



M.R.N // My Fairytale is

My safe haven / My space

Its where i stop thinking of the world and my troubles of life

I start thinking of what it would be if I am at peace

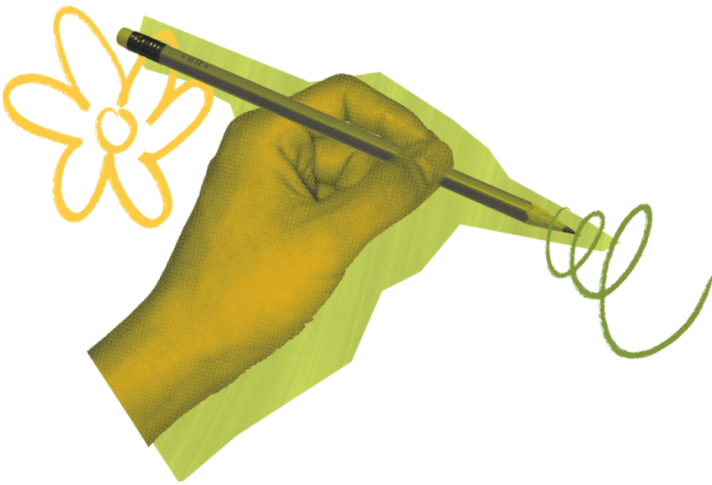
I feel alive in this space

I am my best self

I find true happiness in my imaginations

Fairytale I love you

Thank you



Stacy // What Joy means to me !

The mood that goes up and down
It makes you cheery and yappy
Like tomorrow doesn't exist.

Happy for something that
Feels yet so near but yet so far
A delightful feeling it is

So much so that it appears rarely to many
Making you sing and dance
Leaving merry feels where it passes.

I am lucky to know this feeling
My namesake, my essence,
A name, an emotion,
A fruit of God
I am glad to have known you , Joy.



Angel

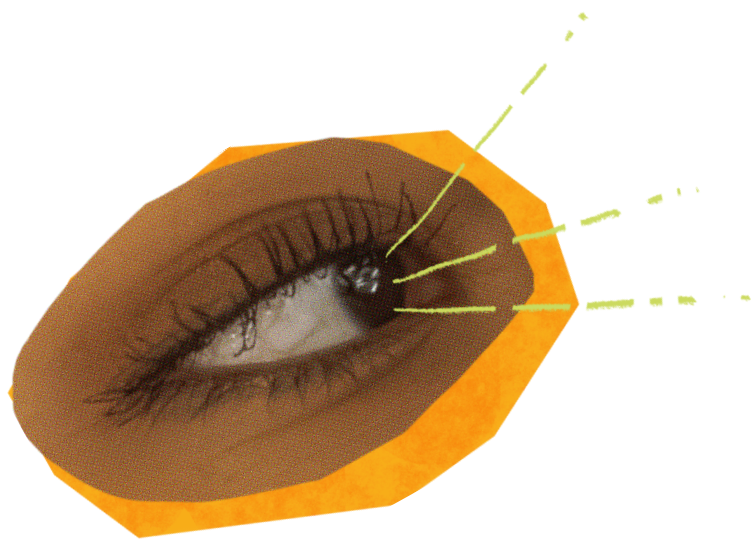
When it's time to leave the house
And descent into the night
You might not see me again, but don't be frightened
I'm with my love, his words pierce my tongue, but sweet moreover
Even if it numbed me to the death, it's still my friend.

This is not about snow.



Koraleigh // Changes

Something changes when I am alone. I am different the moment you leave. I feel lighter. I am no longer plagued by pretending to be someone I'm not.



M // 222

My future is not mine if its not with you
My future should be ours

Our future will consist of hot coffee and tea
You'll bake all the things you've learned since high school
I'll cook all the things I couldn't before

We'll do all the fun things we promised each other
We'll have Late night drives and movie marathons

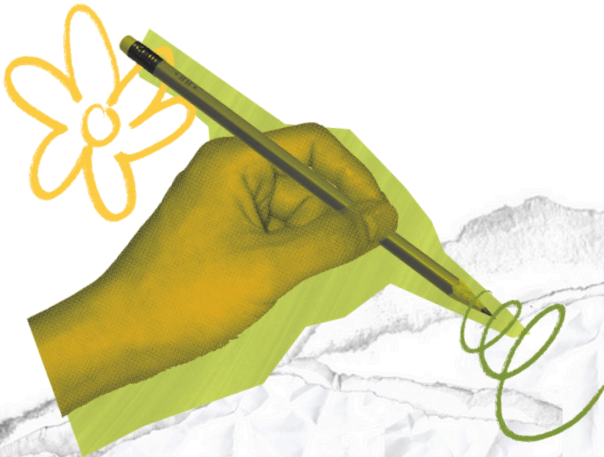
We'll write and we'll draw everything we couldn't
We'll create what we were always meant to create

We'll help each other with our school work
With the motivation we lacked before

The hand we were dealt wasn't so bad after all
So we'll spend all the time that was taken from us as kids

We'll finally be safe and stress free
Leaving everything that hurt us behind

Because the world didn't end when we turned 15
And our quarters did not just sink at the bottom of the wish fountain we call
ours



Acknowledgments

We would like to thank two incredible teachers from Weston Collegiate Institute, Sarah Lewis and Adele Meleca, for collaborating with us to provide this program to their students. Without their efforts, we would not have been able to move forward with this program. We'd also like to thank the Canadian Women's Foundation for funding this initiative. Lastly, we'd like to thank each young person who participated in this program!

What participants had to say...

"The most memorable aspect...was when we discussed what we loved most about each others poems. I think that was a great way to foster community. Not to mention, the food was amazing."

"I love this program, I wish it can come back next year!"

"I think it was nice that we got the chance to share our opinions."

"It was helpful because I got to see different people's solutions on situations."

"The interactive piece made it digestible, because of the many perspectives."

"Relationships was probably one of the most important parts because it could determine how things could play out differently."

"Some people don't realize how traumatic what had happened to them until later on."

"In relationships, Can I trust them? Do I love them? What does love look like? What is it supposed to look like?"

"Some people hurt you and say 'I love you' that could affect how you view the concept of 'love'."

"Wait, let's talk about how sometimes the person being abused doesn't realize. Like verbal abuse and gaslighting."

"You don't recognize the signs until you have someone telling you or figuring it out on your own."

"Stats show more women are assaulted. But that doesn't mean men aren't."

"The prose is like expressing my thoughts and feelings about how I want to live my life."

"I really enjoyed sharing and hearing others."



canvas



sheatre

— *play for a change* —



CANADIAN
WOMEN'S
FOUNDATION

FONDATION
CANADIENNE
DES FEMMES